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A PLEA FOR MORE CONCISE TECHNICAL PAPERS

To the Editor of the Journal:

Now that so many excellent suggestions and criticisms anent the standardizing of observations, using common sense in regard to vernacular names, and kindred topics, are appearing in the Journal, the time seems propitious for calling attention to another matter, and that is the lack of system often to be noted in technical work.

For a long time, when one had occasion to name a new form, brevity seemed to be the height of style, and the rule was for an original description to consist of about a dozen lines. Little more than the designation of a type was attempted, with the result that if one wished to learn the ways in which the new form differed from its close relatives, he was obliged to work this out for himself—if he had the material to do so. Almost anything is better than such fragmentary information. Now, however, the pendulum of style seems to be swinging to the other extreme, and one frequently encounters comparatively unimportant facts and theories of a systematic nature that are clothed with a wealth of detail worthy of more important subjects. Studies that are of a more pretentious character are often buried beneath a perfect avalanche of detail and ultra-scientific language that confuses even the experienced systematist. Why is this necessary? Is it a subconscious effort on the part of the author to impress the reader with his scientific weight? Any zoologist can awe the layman with nomenclatural camouflage, but the more advanced student is impressed only by the annoyance of having to wade through page after page of minutiae while searching for something of real use to him. Perhaps this is only a manifestation of one's enthusiasm and a tendency to be carried away by one's subject, but the fact remains that continual watchfulness and care are necessary in order properly to correlate the unimportant with the important matters, and not overemphasize the former. If due attention is given to such points, not only will the systematic work of others be facilitated, but much of the derision which the general public aims at the strictly scientific worker, because of his excited strivings over, and voluminous publications on, what may well be expressed by the word "piffle," will be annulled.

A. Brazier Howell.